

Special Librarianship as a Career

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SPECIAL LIBRARIES ASSOCIATION

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The old saying that there is nothing new under the sun is true of special librarianship—it is not new but merely the adaptation of a very old profession. We have had libraries and librarians as long as the world has had a way of expressing itself by means of symbols put together so as to convey thought. But we have come a long way from the days of the old monastery libraries, where books were chained and their use confined to a privileged few.

The present generation takes for granted, as a necessary adjunct of its life, the beautifully organized public libraries with their open stacks, their large circulating and reference collections, their children's rooms with their supervised story hours; the school libraries, the excellent college libraries and in the rural districts, the splendid county library systems. Our elders, who may not have had educational opportunities in their youth, likewise take for granted the great development of adult education through the public library. But these are all American developments.

For, it was left to nineteenth century America to see the vision of books for all the people and it took a great many pioneers to bring to fruition the dreams they dreamed. But the very aim of this movement, designed as it was for *all* the people, made it impossible for the public library to meet the demands for more and more specialized information from administrative heads of public, quasi-public, and private corporations, of city, state and federal bureaus, and from the professional man—an increasing number of patrons who did not want the sources, from which they could glean facts, but, rather, the facts themselves. The turn of the century saw these demands met by the assembly of collections of specialized information; saw the development of a new technique for the care and use of the mass of print which even then was pouring from our printing presses; saw the adaptation of old library methods to this new library field—special librarianship.

What is this field and what is its extent? It offers an outlet for the woman who might not consider the more traditional type of general literary work, for the one whose primary interest is in people, in

new and interesting contacts, and in books as tools; for the one with the sleuthing instinct for the obscure or the not-yet-in-print information which is demanded today by our highly competitive world. It is *not* for the one seeking a quiet atmosphere of repose; nor for the one who is interested primarily in increasing the desire to read and in fostering the cultural side of life.

It is the narrowest portion of the whole library world and at the same time, seen from another angle, it becomes the broadest—narrow in that an individual special library is confined to some special interest or to the literature of one business or one subject; broad in that the opportunities for special libraries are as wide as the activities of men.

In 1912, M. S. Dudgeon summarized the features of the special library which distinguished it from the general library in these paragraphs, which are as pertinent today as they were then:

"In a *general reference library* the predominating material is books. In a *special library* the material of the most vital importance is not in books—often it is not even in print.

"In a *general reference library* the material is stored, classified, and catalogued so that it constitutes a fertile field into which an investigator can go and glean out information bearing upon his subject. In a *special reference library* the information is already gleaned, made up and concentrated into portable parcels, by the librarian, and is ready to be delivered to the special worker too busy to investigate for himself.

"A *general reference library* is a storehouse of perfectly good well-authenticated though possibly somewhat antique information on subjects or phases of subjects no longer current. The *special library* is a clearing house of live ideas on live problems, many of the ideas being still in a formative stage.

"A *reference library* is an academic institution for the scholar. A *special library* is a utilitarian establishment calculated to serve the worker too busy to take time for scholarly investigation. Often such scholarly attainments as are involved in the investigational work must be furnished by the librarian. The special librarian becomes in fact a bureau of investigation.

"A *general reference library* is preservative. A *special library* is creative.

"A *general reference library* deals largely with the past; it deals with the present and the future only incidentally. The *special library* deals primarily with the present and the future; it deals only incidentally with the past.

"The view of a *general reference librarian* is retrospective; historical. The *special librarian* must have a vision of the future that is almost prophetic."

Whatever else the special library may be, it is above all the central point for information in any organization. As one authoritative definition expresses it:

"A special library is a service organized to make available all experience and knowledge that will further the activities and common objectives of an organization or other restricted group, with a staff having adequate knowledge in the field of specialization and of the activities of the clientele, as well as professional preparation. Its function is (1) to assemble information from published sources both within and without the library, (2) to secure information directly by correspondence and interview from individuals and organizations specializing in particular fields, and (3) to present this information at the appropriate time and place on the initiative of the library as well as upon request, so that it may take an effective part in the work of the organization or group served.

Policies, methods, and collections vary, on the one hand, according to the library's subject interests; and, on the other hand, according to type of organization of which the library is a part."

The Field

The field of special libraries is almost unlimited and in spite of over two thousand well-established libraries now being maintained, the surface has only been scratched. You'll find such libraries in reconstructed houses, in the towers of skyscrapers, in the dull regions of docks and factories, in motion picture and radio studios and in all the marts of trade. They specialize in hundreds of subjects—from accounting, acoustics and advertising, through finance, geography, insurance, medicine, natural history, petroleum, rubber, on down through the alphabet to zinc. There is a potential opening for such specialized service in every bank and investment house; every chamber of commerce, and every trade, professional, civic, religious, or labor association; every board of education; every insurance, public utility, manufacturing, engineering, and advertising firm; every museum, foundation, publishing house and newspaper—in brief, in every field of human activity. In addition, many large public libraries have, or are organizing, specialized divisions which are decentralized and control the essential activities of a library and do not act merely as custodians of special collections. This sort of special division constitutes another type of special library. Some departmental libraries in the larger universities, serving the faculty and students of a special school, and similarly organized, may also be considered as special libraries.

There has just appeared a volume under the title "Special Library Resources" which gives detailed information on resources available in 765 special

libraries spread over territory stretching from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico and from the Atlantic to the Pacific. This is merely the first of three proposed volumes which will be necessary to cover the entire field. An analysis of this volume shows roughly that about two-fifths are in the field of science and technology; one-fifth in the fields of business and economics; one-sixth in sociological and the rest in fine arts and miscellaneous fields. Compared with a similar analysis in 1935, this shows an increasing demand for personnel trained in the sciences. Doubtless, our present war economy will mean expansion of existing libraries as well as the organization of new ones. To man these libraries, the ranks of well-trained special librarians must be greatly increased.

Qualifications

Here is a real job for any woman. But before deciding to make this profession a life work it is well for a candidate to consider whether or not she has the fundamental qualifications necessary to success. What are they? Native ability—a bit above the average; a sense of humor as a cushion against the irritations and the stress and strain under which you are apt to work; mental curiosity to goad you into learning more and more about your subject and your organization; quickness of comprehension to enable you to understand the need, to ask intelligent questions which will clarify the problem and to talk the language of the inquirer; accuracy and more accuracy; resourcefulness, for the answer is not always writ in black and white and you may have to go down many byways and reach out by telephone, telegraph and cable before you track it down; breadth of vision to enable you to see the many ramifications which may enter into the solution of a problem; initiative to keep you ahead of the game and thus to have the basic information available before it is asked for; and, finally, tact—if you have it, you can deal successfully with the many temperaments—and tempers—from the president to the office boy. These are called fundamental because, by most standards, they are innate and not a matter of education. The potential special librarian should have a broad cultural, literary and factual background as well as specialized training in a chosen field of activity. She should develop the ability to analyze all the factors involved in the problem in hand, to separate the essential from the non-essential, and to condense and present all pertinent facts.

Education and Training

In planning a college program and in selecting courses and major subjects the primary consideration for the future special librarian should be natural bent, discovered in response to the question,

what kind of special library would I be most interested in organizing or developing? Would it be in the field of chemistry, medicine, law, technology, business, insurance, finance? This decision having been made, the major should be chosen with this eventual goal in mind. However, regardless of subject matter of the special collections, there are certain courses which have proved their value to all special library workers. Wherever obtainable, courses should be taken in the social sciences, viz., general sociology, political economy, both general and business economics, general and applied psychology, statistics; in history, English composition, literature, languages, particularly modern, although Latin and Greek are also imperative in a theological or religious library and would prove extremely valuable in a legal library; logic, which is useful later in classifying material. Other courses, which may be taken in college when available and when time allows or may be postponed to the technical training period, are those used in preparation for editorial work, such as proof-reading, abstracting, and report writing. The writing of briefs teaches one how to accumulate and how to trace references, the orderly arrangement of information acquired in search, and the making of bibliographies, and is valuable in those special libraries where information is supplied in the form of reports and memoranda.

Today, we do not think of employing a lawyer who has not had his legal training or a physician who has not attended a reputable medical school. By that same reasoning, the student should not expect to step from the college campus into a special library—or for that matter into any library—without proper professional education. Of course, it can be done but, without professional training, opportunities are rare, the untrained worker is always slightly hampered, and the road to success is longer and harder. She starts with a handicap which, possibly, may never be overcome.

Professional education for librarianship is now offered by thirty schools which conform to the standards of the Board of Education for Librarianship of the American Library Association. (For list, see table on pages 8 and 9.) The majority of these schools offer a one-year general course designed to give basic preparation for all kinds of library work. Some offer second-year courses where one may take advanced work. At present, it is impossible to give any estimates of the costs of tuition, board, books, etc., because of the rapidly changing conditions of a wartime economy.

For many years, the school at Columbia University stood alone in giving a distinct course in special library administration and methods, although several others included lectures on one or more phases of special librarianship. Gradually, however, the schools have attempted to meet the

Name of School and Location (Arrange

University of California, School of Librarianship (Berkeley)
 University of Southern California, Graduate School of Lib
 University of Denver, School of Librarianship (Denver)
 Emory University, Library School (Emory University, Geo
 University of Chicago, Graduate Library School (Chicago)
 Rosary College, Department of Library Science (River Fr
 University of Illinois, Library School (Urbana).....
 Kansas State Teachers College, Library School (Emporia)
 Louisiana State University, Library School (Baton Rouge)
 Simmons College, School of Library Science (Boston).....
 University of Michigan, Department of Library Science
 University of Minnesota, Division of Library Instruction (C
 College of St. Catherine, Department of Library Science (C
 New Jersey College for Women, Library School (New Br
 Columbia University, School of Library Service (New Yo
 New York State College for Teachers, Department of Li
 Pratt Institute, Library School (Brooklyn, New York) ..
 Syracuse University, School of Library Science (Syracuse)
 University of North Carolina, School of Library Science
 Western Reserve University, School of Library Science (C
 University of Oklahoma, School of Library Science (Nor
 Carnegie Institute of Technology, Carnegie Library Scho
 Drexel Institute of Technology, School of Library Science
 George Peabody College for Teachers, Library School (N
 Texas State College for Women, Department of Library
 College of William and Mary, Department of Library Sci
 University of Washington, School of Librarianship (Seat
 University of Wisconsin, Library School (Madison).....
 McGill University, Library School (Montreal, Canada)..
 University of Toronto, Ontario College of Education, Libr

- ¹ Board of Education for Librarianship, American Libr
- ² I Includes those requiring at least a Bachelor's degree beyond first year.
 II Includes those requiring four years of college work in science.
 III Includes those *not* requiring four years of college work in science.
- ³ Emphasizes service in schools and colleges.
- ⁴ Requires a college degree for admission.
- ⁵ Accredited curriculum in summer sessions also.
- ⁶ Graduate study only.
- ⁷ Emphasizes service in Catholic schools and colleges.

LIBRARY SCHOOLS¹

Geographical by State)	Type 2
Library School (Los Angeles)	I 5
Library Science (Los Angeles)	II
Library School (Los Angeles)	III 5
Library School (Georgia)	II 5
Library School (Illinois)	I 5, 6
Library School (Forest, Illinois)	III 5, 7
Library School (Illinois)	I 5
Library School (Illinois)	III 3
Library School (Illinois)	II 5
Library School (Illinois)	II & III 5
Library School (Ann Arbor)	I 5
Library School (Minneapolis)	III
Library School (St. Paul)	III
Library School (Brunswick)	III
Library School (New York)	I 5
Library School (Albany)	III 3, 4, 5
Library School (Albany)	II
Library School (New York)	II 5
Library School (Chapel Hill)	II 5
Library School (Cleveland, Ohio)	II 5
Library School (German)	III 4
Library School (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)	II
Library School (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)	II
Library School (Nashville, Tennessee)	II 3, 5
Library School (Denton)	III 3, 5
Library School (Williamsburg, Virginia)	III 3, 5
Library School (Seattle)	II
Library School (Seattle)	II
Library School (Seattle)	II
Library School (Toronto, Canada)	II

Library Association, November 1941.

for admission and/or giving advanced professional training

for admission and giving only one full year of library

work for admission and giving only one full year of library

demand for training in this field and, at present, about one-third of them offer one or more courses of interest to the prospective special librarian. Those offering the greatest possibilities are Columbia University, Simmons College, Pratt Institute, Southern California, and, in Canada, McGill University and the University of Toronto. The prospective student is urged to examine carefully the library school catalogs to determine the curriculum best suited to her interests.

Scholarships and loan funds in limited amounts are available in some of these schools and preparation for librarianship is considered within the scope of grants made by many of the organizations and foundations offering such grants; these, however, are, for the most part, given for advanced study. Information regarding scholarships, fellowships, and loan funds available may be obtained from the Institute of Women's Professional Relations or from the American Library Association, 520 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Entrance to the Profession

Several alternatives are open to the new recruit. First, she may enter by way of the public library. If this course is chosen, it is well to try to secure a position in one of the special divisions of a large public library where the type of work most closely approximates that of a special library. Such experience gives a familiarity with standard library practice and standard reference sources. It also lays a basis for mutual respect on the part of the workers in the general and special fields and forms the foundation for later close cooperation between them.

Another possibility is to enter a special library as an assistant, advancing through various grades of cataloger, reference assistant, research assistant, statistician, and executive as ability, training and natural bent allow. This, of course, gives one an excellent opportunity of finding one's *forte* and helps in the decision which must eventually be made as to whether one is particularly interested in the purely technical phases, such as cataloging which demands in special libraries an unusual amount of adaptability and foresight, or whether one leans toward the planning and administrative angle, in which case the next step is, of course, the organizing and administering of a special library as librarian-in-charge.

A third possibility, especially for the woman who longs for a business career, is to enter the profession after some strictly business experience. This, of course, has the great advantage of giving a familiarity with business methods, terminology and organization which is a requisite in libraries in the business and economics field. It is also recom-

mended that some formal education in business administration be obtained.

The fourth possibility which is rare and not to be highly recommended is to become librarian-in-charge immediately.

Earnings

Standards vary widely according to geographic distribution but the professionally trained college graduate without experience may expect to enter the special library field at a salary of \$1,300 to \$1,800. This would, in most cases, be offered for a position as assistant in one of the established libraries having a number of workers on the staff. In the rare cases, where the inexperienced appointee would be expected to take charge of a collection already organized or to organize a new library, the beginning salary might be proportionately higher, probably \$1,500 to \$2,400.

In almost no other field of endeavor is future earning power so absolutely dependent on the individual as it is in the special library field. Most general libraries have set scales, minimums and maximums and fixed schedules of increases, so that no matter how superior an individual's work may prove it is difficult to obtain special recognition. To be sure this may be true in a small number of organizations which maintain special libraries, but in the great majority of cases the determining factor is the ability of the individual librarian to sell the ideal of library service and the salary is made commensurate with her proved value to the specific organization. Thus we find a range of salary for librarian-in-charge from \$2,000 to \$10,000, the latter, of course, an exception. The average would range from \$2,500 to \$5,000, depending on the size of the library, its place in the organization, and the demands made on it. Business firms particularly are ready and willing to pay for value received.

Considerations other than Financial

In choosing a career, possible earnings are apt to be an important factor in the decision. However, one must likewise consider other compensations. To the special librarian, probably the greatest personal satisfaction is found in contact with the library clients, the executives, the employees, and the other library users. In most cases the clientele is a fixed and known factor and the librarian is cognizant of their problems from day to day, can check up and find out whether the library is really helping them solve their problems, can call to their attention new books, ideas, patents, scientific discoveries, and all the many events of a rapidly moving world, any one of which may be of inestimable help by its very timeliness.

Another consideration, if the special library is in the business and economics field, is that here is one of the few places in the business world where a woman is free to build and earn her place on her own merits practically secure from direct competition with men.

Then, again, while there is necessary routine in the special library as there is in every organized endeavor, variety is one of the outstanding features of the day's work. The questions that come may vary from a simple verification of a name or fact to a request for a detailed report on some intricate problem of the day. On occasion one must turn detective and unearth information from places, where, to the inexperienced eye, no information seems to exist. Again, one may be forced to use airmail, telephone, telegraph, cable, in an effort to locate an elusive fact. Variety is also a part of the day's work because so often activities, not ordinarily associated with library service, are assigned to the library as the department of the organization best able to carry them on. Such assignments as the following are commonly accepted as coincident with other work: translation from foreign languages, the writing of articles for the company's house organ, editing, indexing, distributing company publications, supervising mailing lists and printing jobs, proof-reading, personnel service, keeping membership and advertising records, assisting in educational work conducted for employees, and other tasks too numerous to mention. This is one of the ideals of the special librarian, to watch for and assume special jobs not directly within the province of the library but which the library staff is equipped to do. Inevitably, these contacts with keen minds, this alertness to every item which may assist the organization, this sleuthing, fact gathering and fact producing result in satisfying personal growth.

Advantages and Disadvantages

In contrast to the public library, the ordinary special library has regular hours, no night work, Saturday half-holiday and often, in summer, full Saturday holiday. Oftentimes, the librarian will be sent to conventions or on other missions at the expense of the company if this will prove of value to the library and organization.

On the other hand, the hours are sometimes longer than in the public library and the vacation period shorter, now usually two weeks. In a large corporation where floor space is at a premium quarters for the library may not be assigned to the place best fitted for the service but rather the place that can be spared from other use. Necessity may also demand that the library move frequently. Such conditions are a challenge to the special librarian, as is the other grave disadvantage, the

sensitive response to general business conditions. In past times of general depression the special library has considered itself lucky if it suffered nothing more than retrenchment. The last depression, however, proved the irreplaceable nature of special libraries for, while their activities were curtailed with those of other departments, they were not disbanded and new ones are constantly being formed. Here, too, one might note that marriage seems not to be a factor in employing or retaining special librarians.

I firmly believe there are great possibilities in this profession and I think that opportunities are going to increase. One of the first things that the new defense organizations did was to set up libraries; this, in spite of the innumerable libraries already existing in the national capital. Mobilization is the watchword of the day. Mobilization of men and resources is progressing every day. Surveys are in order—surveys to establish what? **FACTS** and facts are the foundation stones of specialized library service—facts on industrial production, on strategic materials, on labor, price and export control, on government contracts, on taxation, and on new laws and legislation.

Unorganized, these facts remain merely raw material. Properly organized and studied, adapted to the needs of the particular business or organization, appraised and put into the hands of executives when they are most needed, they become a dynamo of potential service in the task of taking the guess out of business. If executives are to have accurate and up-to-date factual information, this dynamo of raw material must be put in motion and controlled by workers specially trained for the task. Certainly the enlightened executive who has not yet organized his own service can not much longer remain in the dark if he is to meet the competition under wartime developments and in the postwar reconstruction. Potential directors of these new collections must be prepared to take their places in this expansion.

Professional Organization

The Special Libraries Association, founded in 1909, is a national organization of over 2,600 members, devoted to the interests of the special library field, to placing the new, as well as the experienced, worker in the position best suited to her abilities, and in serving as a clearing house of information on everything associated with the profession. Information, advice, and answers to specific questions can be obtained through the Executive Office, maintained at 31 East 10th Street, New York City.

With the National Association are affiliated the following 20 chapters: Albany Capitol District, Baltimore, Boston, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Connect-

icut, Greater St. Louis, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Milwaukee, New Jersey, New York, Philadelphia Council, Pittsburgh, San Francisco Bay Region, Southern California, Washington, D. C., Montreal and Toronto.

In addition, the membership is divided into ten groups according to the interest of the library with which the members are associated: Biological Sciences, Commerce, Financial, Insurance, Museum, Newspaper, Public Business Librarians, Science Technology, Social Sciences, and University and College. This grouping offers an opportunity for coordinated work on common problems and aid and advice among members working in the same subject.

An annual conference is held and an official organ, *Special Libraries*, published, these factors serving to keep the membership cognizant of latest developments in the field.

Librarians and Specialists

Have I helped you to understand the special library profession? Can you visualize the extent of the movement in every field ranging from the large library with many thousands of books on its shelves and a staff of fifty to administer it, to the small one-man library which may consist of a few books, a few file cases, a telephone, and a resourceful librarian? The same ideal permeates the two extremes and all between, an ideal of service, of putting knowledge to work, of providing facts where and when they are needed, of knowing sources of information, of being ready to meet the demand before it is made, of watching for trends that forecast the future needs and interests of the clientele served, by specialists who are incidentally librarians or librarians who are incidentally specialists. I think I shall be unchallenged in saying that probably the most important part of the special library's equipment is human brains and human resourcefulness.

Suggested Reading

The student considering special librarianship as a career and wishing to secure further information may well consult a file of the official organ of the Special Libraries Association, *Special Libraries*, now in its 33rd year.

For surveys of the field and descriptions of typical libraries in various fields, the following are recommended:

Alexander, Mary Louise. The special librarian; what she is; what she can do; where to find her; how much to pay her. (In *Special Libraries*, July-August, 1940, p. 248-50.)

Business profits and the use of published information: a panel discussion. (In *S. L. A. Proceedings*, 30th Annual Conference, 1938, p. 18-23.)

Reasons for establishing a special library, the service it may give, and its place in the organization.

Cavanaugh, Eleanor S. How the special librarian serves the business man. (In *Special Libraries*, July-August, 1936, p. 181-2.)

Specific illustrations of types of service and a good evaluation of the librarian's duties.

Handy, Daniel N. Creation and development of an insurance library. New York, Special Libraries Association, 2d rev. ed., 1941, 44p.

Includes data on organization, personnel and sources of information.

Haskin, Gladys R. An art school library. (In *Special Libraries*, April, 1940, p. 129-30.)

Jones, Edith K. Hospital libraries. Chicago, American Library Association, 1939, 208p.

Types of hospitals and forms of service.

Kimball, Alice M. Librarians meet a new era. (In *Independent Woman*, May, 1937, p. 140, 157-8.)

A non-librarian's view of opportunities in the field.

Lewton, Lucy O. Engineering library. (In *Special Libraries*, January, 1938, p. 13-16.)

Mossman, William T. Corporation library: its growth and use. (In *S. L. A. Proceedings*, 30th Annual Conference, 1938, p. 15-17.)

Service in a technical library.

Richardson, F. C. Previous to previews. (In *Wilson Bulletin*, May, 1939, p. 589-92.)

Work of a motion picture research library.

Special library in business. New York, Special Libraries Association, 1936, 16p.

Covers steps in the library's organization, qualifications of the librarian, and the library's basic tools.

Sprague, Frances. Informational needs of a broadcasting company. (In *Special Libraries*, January, 1941, p. 10-12.)

Describes the library of the National Broadcasting Company.

What the special library profession offers. New York, Special Libraries Association, 1938, 132p.

Surveys of service in fifteen fields, with salary information, bibliographies, etc.

Of course, it is not necessary to add that it is wise to read as widely as possible the literature of one's special subject, not only to acquire a good working knowledge of the subject itself but also to discover its relation to other subjects.

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